

THE
CAUSE AND COMMENCEMENT OF THE WAR
BETWEEN
GREAT BRITAIN AND AMERICA
IN 1812.

READ BEFORE THE LITERARY AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF
QUEBEC ON THE 23RD DECEMBER, 1879,

BY

JAMES STEVENSON,

ASSOCIATE MEMBER.

QUEBEC :

PRINTED AT THE "MORNING CHRONICLE" OFFICE.

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It would not be easy for me to say a few words on "The cause and commencement of the war between Great Britain and America in 1812," which would be interesting to you, without first glancing at the contemporary history of the United States. I shall therefore refer to the history of the rise of the Republic as it has been told by American and other authors; to its position as an independent neutral power during the Napoleonic wars; to the steps that were taken by the Government of Great Britain to protect themselves from interference by preventing commercial intercourse between the States and the enemies of England; to the right of search which they insisted upon for British seamen on American ships; to the complications which grew out of the exercise of that right—which led to hostilities, and to the war of 1812, in which Canada took a prominent part as a belligerent power. It will readily occur to you that I cannot give the whole of this programme in one lecture; but I shall go as far as time will permit, without, I trust, taxing your patience too severely.

The treaty of peace between Great Britain and the United States at the conclusion of the war for independence was signed at Versailles on the 3rd of September, 1783. That treaty declared the confederate colonies to be free, sovereign and independent States, and that the King of Great Britain would treat them as such, and relinquish all claims to the Government, propriety, and territorial rights of the States. The King, in his speech from the throne, said: "I have sacrificed every consideration of my own to the wishes and opinion of my people. I make it my humble prayer to Almighty God that Great Britain may not feel the evils which might result from so great a dismemberment of the Empire, and that America may be free from those calamities which have formerly proved, in the mother country, how essential monarchy is to the enjoyment of constitutional liberty. Religion, language, interest, affection, may, and I hope will yet prove a bond of permanent union between the two nations, to this end neither attention nor disposition shall be wanting on my part."

In February, 1785, John Adams was appointed Minister Plenipotentiary of the United States at the Court of St. James. Adams was an accomplished man of business, his services were of great importance to his country. Having studied law at Cambridge, he joined the Bar in 1759. His first open advocacy of Colonial independence was in the support of the application of the Boston citizens to have the courts of law re-opened, when they had been closed, on the ground that their proceedings were informal without stamps. He was engaged in the construction of Congress. He was one of the committee for preparing the celebrated declaration. He organized the system which gave its war service to the United States, and was instrumental in putting the army in the hands of Washington. Adams was in every way a worthy representative of the young

Republic. He was graciously received by King George, and was affected almost to tears by the honest words of the good King. "I was the last man in the Kingdom, he said, to consent to the independence of America; but now it is granted, I shall be the last man in the world, sir, to sanction a violation of it." Pitt, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, who perceived the advantages which would accrue to Great Britain by the establishment of friendly relations with the United States, introduced a Bill for the regulation of commerce between the two countries, but it was defeated by the Tories, and the Government, of which he was a member, shortly after resigned office.

It was held by leading economists of the day that the one point to be ascertained by each community is what it can produce the largest amount of at the cheapest rate, and having discovered that, it has nothing to do in the future than to produce it, that every country should be engaged in growing or manufacturing the special articles which nature intended to be its contribution to the common stock. Adams endeavored to negotiate a treaty of commerce, founded on this formula, with the new Cabinet—a treaty which would give cheap bread to the people of England and create a market for their manufactures in the United States of America; but as no regard was paid to his representations, and finding that he could accomplish nothing in England, he asked and obtained leave to return home. The Tory Ministry subsequently adopted a restrictive or protective policy, hostile to the interests of the United States. All the ports of the West Indies were closed against their shipping by the enactment of laws prohibiting the importation of United States produce, consisting of fish, flour, beef, butter, pork, lard, &c., unless in British bottom, and American grain was shut out entirely from the remunerative markets of Great Britain by the operation of the corn laws.

The prospects of the young Republic at the close of the war for independence were by no means bright. Although the Americans were emancipated from British rule, although a system which forbade the manufactures of iron, the erection of forges, the making of hats, and generally, imposed restrictions upon colonial trade of every kind which was supposed to affect British interests, ceased to exist, they had not attained to a state of real independence, their manufactures and arts, their literature and laws, science and religion, were largely tributary to the mother country. They had not yet formed themselves into a nation, and it was not until the convention of States which met at Philadelphia in 1787, that their present Constitution was framed. The work occupied four months, and after a thorough discussion of the instrument in the several States, it was finally adopted by them all. The Constitution went into operation after two-thirds of the States had voted in the affirmative, and then only did the history of the United States properly begin.*

The thirteen States were:—Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, South Carolina, New Hampshire, Virginia, New York, North Carolina and Rhode Island. George Washington, of Virginia, was elected President, and John Adams, of Massachusetts, (the same who had been Ambassador to England) Vice-President. Washington and Adams entered upon office on the 30th of April, 1789; their administration witnessed a rapid consolidation of the nation, and the inauguration of a sound system of finance. It was distinguished by some impressions and effects of the French revolution; and the rise of two great political parties: the Federalists led by Washington, Adams, Hamilton and Jay, who were satisfied with the organization of the Government, and the turn which affairs were beginning to take; and the

* Lossing—Field book of the war of 1812.

Republicans, or Democrats, as they were afterwards called, who to a hearty sympathy with the French Revolutionists, joined a strong feeling of state rights.

Among the leaders of the latter were Jefferson, Madison, and Samuel Adams. The Federalists were the Conservatives who looked with little favor on the movement in France against the monarchical principle. The Democrats were the Radicals who wished to help France on to success. On all those issues party strife ran high; but there was one line of policy in which both parties agreed—viz: in carrying on war against the Indians of the great West—a policy which had prospective consequences of serious import in regard to the war of 1812, as we shall see hereafter.

John Adams was elected President in 1797, and Thomas Jefferson, a Democrat, Vice-President. This administration was distinguished by the existence of very critical relations with France, the adjustment of their differences was barely accomplished without war. C. C. Pinckney, Ellridge Gerry, and John Marshall were named Commissioners and sent to Paris to negotiate an amicable settlement of differences between the two countries. Instead, however, of obtaining a courteous hearing, they were met by an intimation that unless a considerable sum of money were forthcoming war might be the result. "War be it then, not one cent of tribute," was the spirited reply; and hostilities actually began with a naval combat in the West Indies; but on the accession of Napoleon to power in France, peace was restored.

In 1799, George Washington died at Mount Vernon, in the 67th year of his age; and in 1800 the seat of Government was removed from New York to Washington. A census then showed a national population of something over five million.

The election of Thomas Jefferson as President, Aaron Burr and George Clinton as Vice-Presidents in 1801, indicated a radical change in political opinion. Jefferson was a statesman of considerable power, which he exercised with administrative skill. He had bitter enemies to contend with in carrying on the Government, but warm and devoted friends to support his policy. Four new States had been admitted to the Union: Vermont, Kentucky, Tennessee and Ohio, making now in all a confederation of seventeen States. Louisiana, comprising then the whole of that immense territory enclosed by the Mississippi river, the Pacific Ocean, the Gulf of Mexico, and the British Provinces in the North, belonged to the French by right of discovery. Under the administration of Jefferson that entire tract, consisting of more than 900,000 square miles, was obtained from France for the paltry sum of \$15,000,000—an acquisition which doubled the national area, and added 85,000 whites and 40,000 slaves to the federal population.

The Jefferson administration had many difficulties to contend with. The relations between the United States and Great Britain were becoming daily more critical. The right of search for British sailors on American ships which England insisted upon exercising, was considered an insufferable assumption. The Berlin Decree issued by Napoleon in November, 1806, forbidding all correspondence or trade with England, defining all articles of English manufacture as contraband, and the property of all British subjects as lawful prize of war, induced England to issue, in retaliation, Orders in Council prohibiting all neutral trade with France or her allies, unless through Great Britain; and to give efficacy to those orders she kept a naval force at sea and cruizers along the coast of America. The Americans, who till then had had a glorious time of it in carrying and trading as neutrals, complained that they suffered from the acts of the cruizers, that the conduct of

Great Britain was an unprovoked attack upon their commerce; that the right of search which she claimed and practised was an encroachment upon their national independence. The whole trouble grew out of the mighty feud between France and England; and France was quite as much at fault for any injustice suffered by the young Republic as England; but it was towards England chiefly, if not solely, that a bitter feeling of resentment existed in the United States. England had no desire to break with America; and although the British Government refused to repeal the obnoxious Orders in Council or relinquish the right of search, they determined by every reasonable means to avoid a quarrel with the offspring of England across the ocean. That prudent policy, however, was frustrated by the proceedings of the Admiral in command of the British North American squadron, who, in the exercise of the alleged right of search, authorized an attack on the U. S. frigate "Chesapeake," for the purpose of seizing on board of that vessel some deserters from the British navy. As this act of aggression may be considered the indirect, if not the direct cause of the war of 1812, it will be necessary for me to give a sketch of the event before going any further.

While some British men-of-war were at anchor in Chesapeake Bay, in the spring of 1807, several seamen deserted and entered the service of the United States on board the frigate "Chesapeake," and afterwards openly paraded the streets of Norfolk, Virginia, in sight of their officers, under the American flag, protected by the Magistrates of the town and the recruiting officer, who refused to give them up, although they were demanded by the British Consul as well as the Captains of the ships from which the men had deserted. Admiral Berkley, in command of the British squadron, thereupon directed the Captains of the ships under his command, in case of meeting with the American frigate "Chesapeake" at sea, and without the

limits of the United States, to search her for the seamen, as he alleged, according to the customs and usage of civilized nations on terms of peace and amity with each other—conceding the same right to Americans if they should make a similar demand. On the morning of the 22nd of June, His Majesty's ship "Leopard," Captain Humphreys, proceeded to sea, and meeting the American frigate "Chesapeake," Commodore Barron, about fourteen miles from land, hailed her, and said, "he had despatches from the British Commander-in-chief." The "Chesapeake" hove to, and an officer from the "Leopard" was sent on board with the Admiral's orders and a letter from Captain Humphreys, saying that he hoped to be able to execute the Admiral's order in the most amicable manner. Upon reading the order and the letter, Commodore Barron stated that his orders from his Government were most peremptory, to prevent any foreigner from mustering his ship's company, that he had no deserters, and that his instructions prevented his allowing the "Chesapeake" to be searched. On receiving this answer, the "Leopard" edged down to the "Chesapeake," and Captain Humphreys hailing, said "that Commodore Barron must be aware that the order of the British Commander-in-chief must be obeyed," the only answer made to this was "I do not understand what you say," which was evidently evasive, for the "Leopard" was to windward and the hail must have been heard. Orders were then given to fire a shot across the "Chesapeake's" bow from the lower deck; after a minute another; and in two more, no satisfactory answer having been given, a broadside was poured into her. The "Chesapeake" did not return the fire, but Commodore Barron hailed, when orders were given to cease firing; but as he only said he was going to send a boat on board, and as they were preparing to return the fire, it was supposed to be an artifice to gain time, and orders were again given to fire—two more broadsides were the result—when she

struck. Two Lieutenants, with several midshipmen, then went on board the "Chesapeake" to search for deserters, and after being there three hours, returned with four—two others identified were found killed, and one jumped overboard. Of the "Chesapeake's" crew six were killed and twenty-four wounded. Of her officers, Commodore Barron, who behaved in the coolest manner during the attack, was slightly wounded in the leg by a splinter. The Commodore wrote to Captain Humphreys, saying that he considered the "Chesapeake" his prize and that he was ready to deliver her up. Captain Humphreys replied that as he had executed the orders of the Commander-in-chief, he had nothing more to do with her, that he must forthwith join the rest of the squadron, and that he not only lamented most sincerely the necessity that compelled him to violent measures, but that if he could render any service he would cheerfully do it.

The attack of the "Leopard" on the "Chesapeake" was felt by the Government and people of the United States as an outrage upon the honour and independence of the nation, as an insult beyond the possibility of forbearance, calling for immediate attention and claiming resentment. A Proclamation was consequently issued by President Jefferson, requiring all armed vessels bearing Commissions under the Government of Great Britain then within the harbours or waters of the United States immediately and without delay to depart therefrom, and interdicting the entrance of all the said harbours and waters to the armed vessels and to all others bearing Commissions under the authority of the British Government.

This Proclamation was followed by the dispatch of an armed schooner, the "Revenge," to England, with instructions to the American Ministers to demand reparation for insults and injuries in the case of the "Chesapeake," and

to suspend all other negotiations until it should be granted. Unfortunately for the success of special negotiations, these instructions also directed them, in addition to a demand for an apology and indemnity to the families of the killed, to insist, by way of security for the future, that the visitation of American vessels in search of British subjects should be relinquished. This was inadmissible. The British Government refused to treat upon any other subject than that of reparation. The act of aggression was disowned, Captain Humphreys was recalled, Admiral Berkley was superseded, and every reparation offered, but there was a decided aversion to treating at all on the subject of impressments, and the views of the Government on that topic were plainly manifested by Royal proclamation requiring all British mariners in whatever service engaged to leave it forthwith and hasten to the help of their native country then menaced and imperilled.

England, anxious to avoid war with the States, sent Mr. George Henry Rose, M.P., on a special mission of peace to Washington. On his arrival he had several interviews with the Secretary of State, his powers were extensive, he offered reparation for the attack and to make provision for the families of American sailors slain on the "Chesapeake," but required the abrogation of the President's proclamation, shortly after that affair, excluding all British ships of war from the harbours and waters of the United States. To this it was answered that it would not be annulled till other causes of complaint were removed—notably, that relating to seamen. Mr. Rose refused to connect the right of search for seamen with the attack, for it was considered inconsistent with the maritime rights of Great Britain to surrender that power: consequently no progress was made in the negotiations.

Meantime the President communicated to Congress the effect of the Berlin decree and the British Orders in

Council upon the maritime interests and trade of the United States. He secured the passage of the Embargo act prohibiting all vessels in the ports of the United States from sailing for any foreign Port, except foreign ships in ballast, or with cargoes taken on board before notification of the act, and requiring coast-wise vessels to give heavy bonds to load their cargoes in the United States. The little life that was left in American commerce under the pressure of the Orders in Council of England and the Decrees of France, was utterly crushed out by this act. Its professed objects were to induce France and England to relax their practical hostility to neutral commerce ; and to preserve and develop the resources of the United States ; but it accomplished neither : opposition in the Eastern States to the measure was violent and incessant. Among the political pamphlets of the day, we find one in verse by William Cullen Bryant, then a lad of thirteen years of age :

Curse of our Nation, source of countless woe,
From whose dark womb, unreckoned misery flows,
The Embargo rages, like a sweeping wind,
Fear lowers before and famine stalks behind.

Many dreading the horrors of war with England, which they believed the Embargo Act would bring about, preferred giving freedom to the commerce of the country—letting it provide itself against the risks that threatened it, and run the gauntlet of British cruisers, rather than kill it outright. *

Such was the feeling of merchants, but patriotic statesmen holding the dignity and independence of the State as of far more consequence than the temporary interests of trade, advocated the most stringent execution of the Embargo Act. The obnoxious act is supposed to have had

* Lossing—Field book of the war of 1812.

one good effect in the United States, the encouragement and establishment of various manufactures which have been important elements in their national independence and prosperity. *

Although the Eastern and Western States were divided on the subject of the Embargo Act, all parties Federalists and Democrats were united, for a time at least, in a firm resolve that Great Britain should make reparation for the attack on the "Chesapeake," or be made to feel the indignation of the insulted Republic in the power of war. Commodore Barron was accused of neglect of duty tried by Court marshal on specific charges of that nature, found guilty and sentenced to five years suspension from the service without pay or emoluments. The wounded national pride needed a palliative and found it in the supposed delinquency of the unfortunate Commodore †

The critical condition of foreign relations induced the President to call the tenth Congress together in October. The administration party had an overwhelming majority in that body, and was daily increasing in strength throughout the country. The confidence of the Democratic party in Jefferson's wisdom, sagacity, and patriotism was unbounded. In his annual message he gave a narrative of unsuccessful efforts to settle with Great Britain all difficulties concerning search and impressment; considered the affair of the "Chesapeake," the refusal of the British Commanders to obey the orders of his proclamation to leave American waters, the Orders in Council and Decrees, the subject of national defences, contention with the Indians on the frontiers, and the relation with foreign Governments. Efforts were made to increase the efficiency of the navy by adding to the few seamen already in the service, 1272

* Lossing—Field book.

† Lossing—Field book of the war of 1812.

additional men to put upon gun boats then completed or in process of construction. The country, however, was agitated by an approaching election for President and Vice-President, and for a time the vexed questions of search, impressment, Orders in Council, and Decrees were in the shade and had temporarily become of secondary importance. Meanwhile, events were transpiring on both sides of the Atlantic pointing to the abandonment of the policy of Orders, Decrees and Embargo acts. The able enquiry of Mr. Baring, in London, concerning the Orders in Council made a powerful impression upon the mercantile classes in England. The President of the United States had already taken some steps in the direction of repeal. As early as the close of April, 1808, he had sent instructions to Mr. Pinkney, in London, and Mr. Armstrong, in Paris, authorizing them to offer a repeal of the Embargo act on certain conditions; but the Government of Great Britain was not disposed to listen to any proposals while the proclamation concerning the interdiction of British ships of war in American waters remained in force; and the Emperor made no response to Armstrong's proposition, but maintained an ominous silence. In America the Embargo act continued to meet with violent opposition in various forms, especially by the leaders of the Federalists in the Eastern States, who characterized the act as a Southern measure, a subserviency to French dictation. Eminent lawyers in Massachusetts maintained that it was unconstitutional, the exasperation in New England was so great that action among the people and State Legislatures assumed the aspect of incipient rebellion.* Finally, external pressure upon the administration became too great for resistance, and on the 1st March, 1809, the act was repealed. As a pacific countervailing measure to induce European belligerents to respect the rights of neutrals, a non-inter-

* Lossing—Field book of the war of 1812.

course act was passed opening the commerce of America to all the world, except England and France. While British and French ships of war were equally excluded from American ports. This measure was denounced by the opposition in the bitterest terms. Nevertheless the prospect of being allowed to follow unmolested the peaceable pursuits of active life, was brightening; and when John Madison succeeded Jefferson on the 4th March, 1809, it was determined to issue a Proclamation declaring that commercial intercourse with Great Britain shall be free upon the recall of the Orders in Council, but leaving all restrictive laws against France in force. The British Minister at Washington, Mr. Erskine, offered reparation for the insult and injury in the case of the "Chesapeake," and intimated that certain Orders in Council affecting the commerce of neutrals would be withdrawn, as respects the United States. Upon which, President Madison issued a Proclamation that the trade with Great Britain might be renewed. In France, the Emperor professed to be indignant at what seemed to be partiality shown to England by the Americans; but the American Minister succeeded in effecting a settlement of differences with him, in so far, that an Order was issued by the French Government to the Director-General of Customs, not to apply the Berlin decrees to American vessels entering French Ports. The Proclamation in favour of renewed intercourse with England, caused the greatest joy throughout the United States, and was regarded as an omen of brighter days. The voice of partisanship was hushed, and President Madison was lauded as the representative of the whole American people and not of a party only. The joy, however, was short-lived, for Mr. Erskine had to communicate the mortifying fact that his Government refused to affirm his arrangements." In the hope of effecting a settlement of differences, negotiations were continued, but without any favorable result. France and England were still playing their

desperate game, and both doubted the sincerity of the United States.

Mr. Erskine was recalled, and the Right Honorable Francis James Jackson, succeeded him as Minister Plenipotentiary of Great Britain at Washington. The appointment of Mr. Jackson did not give satisfaction to the American Government, because, it is alleged, of his complicity in the attack by British land and naval forces upon Copenhagen, early in September, 1807. However this may be, he was received with cool courtesy at Washington, and, no doubt the effect of his appointment was to widen the breach between the two countries. Of Mr. Jackson, it is said in Lossing's History of the War of 1812—an American author—that he was insolent, irritable and quarrelsome. He had an unbounded admiration of the greatness of the people he represented, and a corresponding contempt for the people he had been sent to. He regarded the Americans as an inferior people, and treated the officers of their Government with hauteur. His manners were so offensive that after the second verbal conference with him, Secretary Smith refused any correspondence, except in writing. The insolent Diplomat was offended, and wrote a letter to the Secretary, which was considered insulting. The American Government requested his recall, and early in 1810, he was summoned back to England. But his Government manifested the greatest indifference as to its relations with the United States. The request for his recall was received with the most perfect coolness, and no other Minister was sent to Washington until early in 1811. Such is the statement concerning Mr. Jackson, which we find in Lossing's History of the War of 1812—a work to which I am indebted for much valuable information. In the volume of Historical Documents, published under the auspices of the Society, I find a despatch from the Marquis of Wellesley, foreign Secretary, to Mr. Pinckney, Minister of the United States

at London, on the subject of the recall of Mr. Jackson, in which it states that His Majesty has been pleased to direct his return to England ; but has not marked, with any expression of displeasure, the conduct of Mr. Jackson ; whose integrity, zeal and ability, have long been distinguished in His Majesty's service ; and who does not appear, on the present occasion, to have committed any intentional offence against the Government of the United States. Meantime, Mr. Jackson having been grossly insulted by the inhabitants of the town of Hampton in unprovoked language of abuse, held by them to several officers bearing the King's uniform, demanded Passports for himself, the gentlemen attached to his mission, and his own family. Mr. Jackson left Washington at once and made New York his place of residence, till arrangements could be made for his return to England. Before leaving, he visited Canada, and in the old copies of the "Quebec Gazette" I find a detailed account of his reception. I have read nothing which gives a better idea of the state of public feeling in Canada at the time ; and as no notice is taken of his reception in history, allow me to read what is said on the subject, and also what Mr. Jackson said about British relations with the United States to the people of Canada.

Montreal, August 13, 1810. Yesterday arrived here from Upper Canada, His Excellency the Right Honorable Francis James Jackson, His Majesty's Minister Plenipotentiary to the United States of America, his lady, and one of their children, a beautiful boy of 4 years old. They put up at Holmes' Hotel, which was no sooner known, than the gentlemen of the City determined upon inviting him to honour them with his company at a Public dinner. The day of Thursday, the 16th, was accordingly fixed upon, and notwithstanding so short a notice, such was the eagerness and anxiety of the public to pay every possible mark of respect to so distinguished a character, that a very numerous

list of English and Canadian gentlemen was rapidly filled up.

Invitations were sent to the Commandant, Major-General Drummond, the field Officers of the 41st regiment, the Officers commanding the Artillery and Royal Engineers, and the heads of Departments of the Garrison. About six o'clock the company, in all 130, sat down to an elegant repast. But what gave double zest to the entertainment was the harmony and good humor that prevailed. Every heart seemed to be actuated by the same feeling of superlative respect for their distinguished guest. The Hon. Mr. McGill was in the chair, and Mr. Justice Panet and the Hon. Mr. Richardson, Vice-Presidents. The toasts given by the President in English, were well translated and repeated in French by Mr. Panet—then follow the customary toasts—the King, the Queen, &c., till two remarkable toasts, or rather sentiments, are reached, viz. : (1) "May the United States, in appreciating their true interests, ever remain in peace and friendship with the country of their forefathers." (2) "May the Democratic party of the United States feel that brutal abuse of a public Minister for fidelity to his trust marks a ferocity that even savages would blush at." On the health of Mr. Jackson being given, the room resounded with applause, which having subsided, he addressed the company. He stated that he must attribute the favorable manner in which he was received to those principles of national policy by which he had been actuated. Those principles which he had the good fortune to imbibe from some of the most illustrious statesmen that have adorned our country, which consist in this, that with every disposition to promote harmony with other powers, the honor and dignity of our Sovereign must be at all risks vindicated—the commercial interests and the naval supremacy of Great Britain must be as strenuously asserted in the Cabinet, as they are gloriously maintained

upon the ocean by those heroes in whom our interests upon that element are deservedly entrusted. After some complimentary remarks to the company, and to the people of the Province generally, whose loyalty to the King had ever been conspicuous, he asked permission to embody his feelings in a toast or sentiment :

“ Union to the Councils and prosperity to the commerce and agriculture of the two Canadas.”

After the toast of “ the Army,” Mr. Jackson requested permission to give one more sentiment, which being readily granted, he spoke as follows :

GENTLEMEN,—You will have observed that in the sentiment I before expressed, there was nothing exclusive, nothing that could give umbrage out of this room. The principles which I then stated are to be asserted, not for the glorification of any selfish object of profit or ambition, still less for the vexation of any less formidable power, but as affording the only safeguard which remains to the freedom and independence which is yet to be found in the civilized world against the system of rapine and usurpation that has so nearly overwhelmed continental Europe, and the only bulwark that can shield this western hemisphere from similar disasters. In those principles, therefore, there is nothing inconsistent with that good will that should exist between us and the neighboring States, where there are men who duly appreciate the value of a good understanding between the two countries. There are those who, able and well informed, would be an ornament to any society, and are capable of unravelling the intrigues and exposing the artifices of their and our enemies ; and who, knowing that the world affords sufficient scope for the spirit of enterprise which in all countries so eminently distinguishes the present age, are convinced that the interests of Great Britain and America not only do not

clash, but are likely most to prosper where they are most united. It is to such men that we must look for the arrival of that period so much desired by the true friends of both countries, when discarding jealousies and banishing every impropitious recollection, remember only that our friends in the United States are blood of our blood and bone of our bone. As for me, I shall carry home with me no other regret than that of not having been the instrument of reconciling differences which have been too actively fomented and suffered to exist too long. I propose as a toast "Prosperity to the United States of America." After which an American gentleman present desired permission to give a toast, which being granted, he gave—"Old England who, with Roman pride and Roman power, hath, during a war of 18 years, resisted and repelled the enormous and overgrown power of Napoleon, and who, with extended arms, hath successfully lashed and buffeted the waves of despotism which have overwhelmed and mercilessly destroyed all continental Europe." The whole went off in the utmost good humor, and we may safely aver that in no country, and upon no occasion, was ever hilarity and decorum more perfectly united.

About nine o'clock on Saturday morning Mr. Jackson and his family embarked for Quebec in a large bark canoe, manned by twelve Canadians, being attended to the water side by a number of the citizens, who repeatedly cheered them as the canoe pushed off from the beach. On Monday Mr. Jackson arrived in Quebec from Montreal with his lady and young son. They appear to have taken two days and a half to reach Quebec by canoe. On Tuesday the principal gentlemen of the place were introduced to Mr. Jackson at Colonel Thornton's, when he accepted an invitation on the part of the merchants to dine with them at the Union Hotel on Friday. Mr. Jackson, his wife and child were the guests of Mr. Matthew Bell, who resided in the country.

There were present at the dinner, His Excellency Sir James Henry Craig, Governor-General, Monseigneur the Catholic Bishop, (the Lord Bishop of Quebec being in Upper Canada) His Majesty's Judges, the Legislative and Executive Councillors, all the staff Officers in Garrison, the Commandant and other field Officers of Regiments in Garrison, and all the different heads of departments, with several of the Catholic and Protestant clergy. The orchestra was filled with the fine band of the King's Regiment, by permission of Colonel Young. At three quarters past five, His Excellency the Governor-General's carriage arrived at the door with His Excellency and Mr. Jackson. They were received and conducted into the House by the principal merchants. At six o'clock, dinner was announced, and His Excellency the Governor-General took his seat on the right of the President, the Hon. James Irvine. Mr. Jackson sat on the left. The rest of the company were placed according to their rank, and the whole, amounting to 120, were commodiously seated. The Vice-Presidents and Managing Committee were John Caldwell, Wm. Burns, D. Monroe, J. Mure, J. Stuart, George Hamilton, B. P. Wagner, J. D. Hamilton and J. H. Joliffe, Esquires, each of whom had his assigned seat and duty to attend to. These names of our late esteemed citizens are doubtless familiar to many in this room. On entering the dinner room the band struck up "God save the King," and continued to play different select pieces of music during the dinner. After the cloth was removed, the following toasts were given and drank by every one present with great glee :

1. The King—band playing "God save the King."
2. The Queen—band playing "God save the King."
3. The Prince of Wales and Royal family—band playing "God save the King."
4. His Excellency the Governor-General, and may we long remain under his paternal Government.

5. Mr. Jackson, His Majesty's Minister Plenipotentiary, whose urbanity, dignity and firmness, united with superior abilities, have enabled him to maintain the honor of our King and country in peculiarly important situations, and under trying circumstances, as affecting his personal feelings—band playing, perhaps appropriately, "We'll gang nae mair to yon town."

When the plaudits ceased, Mr. Jackson returned thanks in the graceful language that distinguishes the expressions of a highly cultivated gentleman; and alluding to his diplomatic mission to the United States, he said: If, gentlemen, I have been enabled, in situations of considerable difficulty and importance, to maintain against the most violent persecution by which a public Minister was ever assailed, a persecution unexampled in the history of the civilized world, the honor and dignity of our Sovereign, and those principles of maritime policy which, if we lose, we lose our all; if under these circumstances, where no means were unemployed to harrow up my feelings in their nearest affections, I have been able to preserve the even tenor of my way, I owe it to the recollection of the responsible situation in which I was placed by my Sovereign, and of the spirit and high feelings of the nation, which, by his favor, I was sent to represent. It is, however, but justice to the most liberal and most enlightened part of the citizens of the United States, to say that their sentiments, as to my personal situation, were in unison with friendly feeling, abhorrent of injustice, and double dealing. Mr. Jackson then makes graceful allusion to the Governor-General whose services, at home and in distant quarters of the world, added lustre to his own name and glory to his country's cause. He then expresses the lively feelings of interest and attachment to the city of Quebec, his thanks for the cordial reception he has met with, and concludes thus: That activity, that intelligence, that spirit of enter-

prise which have at all times so eminently distinguished the British merchant, have accompanied you to these shores. This noble river which, half a century ago, witnessed the energies of British valor, is now the peaceful and fertile scene of British industry. The channel of conveying to Great Britain those supplies for which she has been heretofore tributary to other nations. That this happy state of things may long continue is my sincere wish. I therefore, with the President's permission, propose: "Prosperity to the city of Quebec." Monseigneur the Catholic Bishop proposed "The British nation, may it long enjoy the blessings of Heaven for the kind and liberal hospitality, relief and support it afforded to the Catholic clergy after the revolutions of France and Spain."

Mr. Jackson, his lady and son, left Woodfield, the country seat of Mr. Matthew Bell, next day for Montreal, in one of the Governor's carriages, intending to sleep at Hon. Mr. deLanaudière's at St. Anne's. After remaining one day at Montreal they proceeded to New York, where the "Venus," frigate, arrived to convey them to Great Britain.

In the early part of 1811, Augustus J. Foster, who had been Secretary to the British legation at Washington, was appointed envoy extraordinary to the United States, charged with the settlement of the affairs of the "Chesapeake," and other matters in dispute between the two Governments. He had hardly entered upon the duties of his office, when an event occurred, which dashed the hopes of all those who not unreasonably, had looked for beneficial results from his peaceful mission.

As we have seen, the American Minister succeeded in effecting a settlement of differences between France and the United States, and an order was issued by the Emperor to the Director-General of Customs, not to apply the Berlin decrees to American vessels bound for French Ports. Ever

since that friendly arrangement was entered into, British cruizers, hovering upon the coasts of America, were extremely vigilant, and kept a sharp look-out for outward-bound ships, determined to give efficacy to the British Orders-in-Council, prohibiting all neutral trade with France or her allies, unless through Great Britain. A richly laden American vessel, bound for France, had been captured within thirty miles of New York, and the British frigate "*Guerrière*" exercising the right of search, stopped an American Brig, only eighteen miles from New York, took off a young man, said to be a native of Maine, and impressed him into the British service. As similar instances had lately occurred, the American Government resolved to send out one or two of their new frigates, ostensibly for the protection of their coasting trade; but really to resent the impressment of their citizens by British cruizers.

The U. S. frigate "*President*," Captain Ludlow, was then anchored off Fort Severn, at Annapolis, bearing the broad pennant of Commodore Rodgers, the senior officer of the American Navy. The Commodore was with his family at Havre de Grâce, seventy miles distant; the "*President's*" sailing master was at Baltimore, forty miles distant; her purser and chaplain were at Washington, an equal distance from their posts, and all was listlessness on board the frigate, for no sounds of war were in the air. Suddenly at three o'clock in the afternoon of the 7th of May, while Captain Ludlow was dining on board the sloop-of-war "*Argus*," lying near the "*President*," the gig was seen, about five miles distant, sailing at the rate of ten miles an hour, with the Commodore's broad pennant flying, denoting that he was on board. Rodgers was soon on the "*President's*" quarter deck. He had received orders from his Government to put to sea at once in search of the offending British vessel, and on the 10th he weighed anchor, and proceeded down the Chesapeake with the

intention of cruising off New York as an inquirer concerning the impressment. He stopped on his way down the Bay for munitions, and on the 14th passed the Virginia Capes out upon the broad ocean. He lingered here as an observer for a day or two, and about noon on the 16th, distant about forty miles, he discovered a strange sail on the eastern horizon.* The squareness of her yards and symmetry of her sails proclaimed her a war vessel, which proved to be Her Majesty's sloop-of-war "Little Belt," Capt. Bingham, cruising off the American coast. Bingham also, about the same hour, saw a strange sail, and immediately gave chase. At one, P.M., says he, I discovered her to be a man-of-war, apparently a frigate, standing to the Eastward, who, when he made us out, edged away for us, and set his royals. Made the signal 275, and finding it not answered, concluded that she was an American frigate, as she had a Commodore's blue pendant flying at the main. Hoisted the colors and made all sail south, the course I intended steering, round Cape Hatteras; the stranger edging away, but not making any more sail. At 3.30 he made sail in chase, when I made the private signal which was not answered. At 6.30, finding he gained so considerably on us as not to be able to elude him during the night, being within gun-shot, and clearly discerning the stars in his broad pendant, I imagined the most prudent method was to bring to and hoist the colors, that no mistake might arise, and, that he might see what we were. The ship was therefore brought to, her colors hoisted, her guns double shotted, and every preparation made in case of surprise. By his manner of steering down, he evidently wished to lay his ship in a position for raking which I frustrated by wearing three times. About 8.15, he came within hail—I hailed, and asked what ship it was? He repeated my question. I again hailed, and asked what

* Lossing—Field book of the war of 1812.

ship it was? He again repeated my words, and fired a broadside, which I instantly returned. The action then became general, and continued so for three-quarters of an hour, when he ceased firing, and appeared to be on fire about the main hatchway. He then filled. I was obliged to desist from firing, as, the ship falling off, no gun would bear, and had no after to keep her to. All the rigging and sails cut to pieces, and not a brace nor a bowline left. He hailed and asked what ship this was? I told him. He then asked me if I had struck my colors? My answer was No, and asked what ship it was? As plainly as I could understand (he having shot some distance at this time) he answered the United States frigate. He fired no more guns, but stood from us, giving no reason for his most extraordinary conduct.

At daylight in the morning, saw a ship to windward, when having made out well what we were, bore up and passed within hail fully prepared for action. About 8 o'clock he hailed and said if I pleased, he would send a boat on board; I replied in the affirmative, and a boat accordingly came with an officer, and a message from Commodore Rodgers, of the U. S. frigate "President," to say that he lamented much the unfortunate affair (as he termed it) that had happened, and that had he known our force was so inferior he should not have fired at me. I asked his motive for having fired at all? His reply was that "we fired the first gun at him;" which was positively not the case. I cautioned both the officers and men to be particularly careful, and not suffer any more than one man to be at the gun. Nor is it probable that a sloop-of-war, within pistol shot of a large 44 gun frigate, should commence hostilities. He offered me every assistance I stood in need of, and submitted to me that I had better put into one of the ports of the United States; which I immediately declined. By the manner in which he apologized it appeared

to me evident that had he fallen in with a British frigate, or any ship of war equal in power to his own, he would certainly have brought her to action. And what further confirms me in that opinion is, that his guns were not only loaded with round and grape shot, but with every scrap of iron that could be possibly collected. I have to lament the loss of 32 men killed and wounded, among whom is the master. His Majesty's ship is much damaged in her masts, sails rigging and hull, and as there are many shots through between wind and water, and many shots still remaining inside, and upper works all shot away, starboard pump also, I have judged it proper to proceed to Halifax, &c.

There could be no excuse for the hostile action of Commodore Rodgers. No demand was made for any Americans impressed by the British, no complaint was urged; the frigate commenced hostilities at once, as if the American Government had resolved to cut short all intermission and negotiate only at the cannon's mouth. The "Little Belt" was brought into Halifax harbour on the 26th May in a sinking state—almost shot to pieces. When the news of the attack reached England it created intense excitement, and an opinion generally prevailed that unless reparations were immediately made, or a satisfactory explanation given by the Government of the United States—war would be the consequence; and as a preparatory step for whatever might result, a squadron of four sail of the line, one frigate and a sloop of war, under Sir Joseph York, sailed from Portsmouth for the American coast. Conflicting statements respecting the attack were made on both sides. Commodore Rodgers stated positively that he hailed twice, and his words were repeated by the stranger; that she fired one shot which struck the vessel, then three shots, and immediately afterward the remainder of her broadside, before he opened his guns upon her, except the single shot, which one of the deserters declared was

discharged by accident. The American Government disavowed hostile instructions. Commodore Rodgers was tried by Court martial but acquitted; finally the Government of Great Britain had the courage to refrain from unnecessary retaliation, acquiesced in the *amende* and the matter was buried in official oblivion. The people, however, of the two countries would not let it drop. When the twelfth Congress assembled the administration party was found to be a war party. The Embargo act, which prohibited the sailing of vessels to foreign ports, was supplemented by another act prohibiting exportations by land, whether of goods or specie. Belligerent measures were hailed with joy throughout the country by the war party, who were dominant and determined, but they alarmed the Federalists who were in favor of a policy of peace.

In his message to Congress on the 1st of June, 1812, the President recapitulated the wrongs which the people of the United States were supposed to have suffered at the hands of Great Britain. "We behold, in fine, he said, on the side of Great Britain, a state of war against the United States, and on the side of the United States a state of peace towards Great Britain." The message was referred to the Committee on foreign retaliations, and on the 3rd of June Mr. Colhoun, the Chairman, presented a report in which the causes and reasons for war were stated in historical order. On the presentation of the report, the doors were closed, and a motion to re-open them was lost. Mr. Colhoun then presented a Bill, as part of the report, declaring war between Great Britain and her dependencies, and the United States and its territories. Amendments were offered but rejected, and the Bill, as Colhoun presented it, was passed on the 4th day of June, by a vote of 79 for it, and 49 against it.

When the Bill reached the Senate it was referred to a Committee. It remained under discussion twelve days. Meanwhile the people throughout the country were excited by conflicting emotions. The opponents of the Government, the Federalists, were decidedly against war. A memorial against it went from the Legislature of Massachusetts, and another from the merchants of New York, led by John Jacob Astor, recommending restrictive measures rather than war. War meetings were held in various places, and finally, on the 17th of June—the anniversary of the battle of Bunker Hill—the Bill, with some amendments, was passed by a vote of 19 against 13; and on the afternoon of that day, the signature of the President was attached, and it became law. By a remarkable coincidence the revocation of the obnoxious Order in Council, so bitterly resented by the States, was announced by His Majesty's Ministers to the House of Commons on the very day the Senate passed the Bill declaring war against Great Britain and her dependencies. When this news reached this side the Atlantic, hopes of peace revived; but they were doomed to be extinguished; for political expediency appeared to the American Government to point to war with Great Britain as a necessity: and accordingly war was declared, ostensibly to establish the principle that the flag covers the merchandise, and that the right of search for seamen on neutrals is inadmissible; but really to wrest from Great Britain the Canadas, and, in conjunction with Napoleon, to extinguish her Colonial Empire. It is alleged that the Americans counted upon the sympathy, if not the support, of the French population in the coming struggle; but in this they were mistaken, Republican sentiments were repugnant to the Canadians. An extract from a sermon preached a short time previous to the war of 1812, by the *curé* of Quebec, Messire Plessis (afterwards Bishop) on receiving the news of one of Nelson's naval victories over the French, abundantly testifies to the prevailing feeling in Canada on

the subject of British conection:—"Hélas!" says he, "où en serions nous, mes frères, si de tels esprits prenaient le dessus, si ce pays, par un fâcheux revers, retournait à ses anciens maîtres? maison de Dieu, temple auguste, vous seriez bientôt converti en une caverne de voleurs! ministres d'une religion sainte, vous seriez déplacés, proscrits et peut-être décapités! Chrétiens fervens, vous seriez privés des consolations ineffables que vous goûtez dans l'accomplissement de vos devoirs religieux! Terre consacrée par les larmes et les sueurs de tant de vertueux missionnaires qui y ont planté la foi, vous n'offririez plus aux regards de la religion qu'une triste et vaste solitude. Pères et mères catholiques, vous verriez sous vos yeux des enfans chéris sucer, malgré vous, le lait empoisonné de la barbarie, de l'impiété et du libertinage! tendres enfans, dont les cœurs innocens ne respirent encore que la vertu, votre piété deviendrait la proie de ces vautours, et une éducation féroce effacerait bientôt ces heureux sentimens que l'humanité et la religion ont déjà gravés dans vos âmes. Mais que fais-je, et pourquoi insister sur des réflexions douloureuses dans un jour où tout doit respirer la joie? Non, non mes frères. Ne craignons pas que Dieu nous abandonne si nous lui sommes fidèles. Ce qu'il vient de faire pour nous, ne doit inspirer que des idées consolantes pour l'avenir. Il a terrassé nos ennemis perfides. Réjouissons-nous de ce glorieux événement. Tout ce qui les affaiblit, assure nos vies, notre liberté, notre repos, nos propriétés, notre culte, notre bonheur. Actions de grâces! Prions-le de conserver longtemps le bienfaisant, l'auguste Souverain qui nous gouverne, et de continuer de répandre sur le Canada ses plus abondantes bénédictions."

The declaration of war was received in Quebec on Monday, the 20th June, 1812, and created a perfect tumult of excitement. Orders were read on the Esplanade for the whole Militia of the Province to hold themselves in readi-

ness to be embodied. The regular forces consisted only of the ordinary peace establishment of British troops, and some Colonial Regiments, war with America had not been contemplated by the rulers of England—not another soldier had been sent across the Atlantic—nay, so decidedly Pacific were the intentions of the British Government towards America, that two regiments were actually under orders to leave the country. All was bustle and activity among the military authorities of Quebec in getting ready the means of defence at their immediate disposal. The Militia of the City voluntarily did garrison duty with the regulars; the students of the Seminary had the honour of mounting guard at the Castle of St. Louis; and public prayers were offered up in all the Catholic and Protestant Churches in the City, for a blessing on His Majesty's arms. There was ample evidence that the aptitude of the people of this country for the profession of arms had not been destroyed by the repose of half a century.

In preparing the foregoing paper I have to acknowledge my indebtedness to American authors for information relating to the war, particularly to Mr. Benson J. Lossing, from whose work "Pictorial Field book of the War of 1812," to which I have duly referred and from which I have in many cases transcribed interesting statements verbatim. The archives of the Literary and Historical Society have furnished me with some facts relating to the war, which are, perhaps, now noticed for the first time. If the subject proves interesting, and if my engagements admit of my pursuing it, I shall probably continue the narration of the war on a future occasion, when I intend to dwell more particularly upon the financial arrangements which were made to meet the exigencies of the service—thereby connecting this lecture with the papers on the currency of Canada, which I had the honour of reading before this Society in former years.

Canadian
Paraphrase

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